

Senate Bill 2215
Testimony in Opposition
March 17, 2021

Good morning Chairman Owens and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Lori Furaus. I am a teacher and AVID site coordinator at Simle Middle school in Bismarck. I would like to offer you a view through a unique dual lens of perspective and experience. For the past 8 years, I have served on the Mandan Public School Board. In addition to that role, I have served as president of the Bismarck Education Association for the past 3 years. I am writing to you to respectfully express my opposition to SB 2215.

The shortened timeline proposed is touted by supporters as a method to provide districts structure. In my experience with negotiations there is already a process to provide structure. Ground rules and timelines are established by local districts and their bargaining unit. The timeline proposed in SB 2215 is restrictive and unrealistic. The July 1st deadline is highly concerning. Crucial funding information is not revealed until the last months of the legislative session. How can we expect school districts to begin to negotiate salary and benefits without access to information regarding how much funding they will receive from the state in the next biennium? School districts and bargaining units need time to communicate, develop trust and work through information *together*.

This bill will not resolve the deeper issues that exist in any district that struggles to follow this process smoothly. Adversarial relationships are not the direct product of contentious negotiations. Quite frankly, the inverse is closer to reality. Contentious negotiations are symptomatic of a greater issue. Tipping the power dynamic even further in favor of the district hardly seems to be an earnest attempt to solve the problem of “adversarial relationships” in a handful of districts across the state.

While this bill is largely unnecessary, I commend the alterations that have been made on it thus far. The Senate seemed to understand that a drastically shortened timeline would actually create more problems than it would solve. This was a decent start; however, it does not go far enough to keep the integrity of this process intact. If this bill is left to remain in play, pushing the deadline to August 1st seems most reasonable for both sides.

As educators, we are naturally in the business of focusing on what is best for students. Please allow this process to work as intended. Please do not willfully place unreasonable constraints on a process that was established to provide a voice for our students and teachers as we work to keep classrooms and working

conditions on par with the level of excellence we expect for our education system in North Dakota. These decisions should be made at the local level. Ground rules and timelines are best left to individual school districts and the bargaining unit that they are working with.

I urge you to vote no on SB 2215.

Respectfully,

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